

Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals Area IV: Partnering with Families and Community

Rationale

Children develop in the context of families and communities that are characterized by diversity in family composition, languages spoken, environmental risks/resources, levels of ability, religious belief systems, and cultural practices. While families serve as the primary context for development, early care and education settings comprise a vital context that dramatically impacts development through the quality of care and education provided. Collaborative partnerships with the program's families and the community's resources are essential for creating and for maintaining environments in which children develop optimally in all areas of functioning. Moreover, communities that adequately support parenting as well as early education and care, thereby contributing to the quality of life for all citizens in the community, tend to grow and to develop socially and economically.

Knowledge

1. The family serves as the primary context for children's development.
 - Family members are a source of information regarding the family's goals and values, the child's previous experiences and current living situation, as well as observations of ongoing development.
 - Family members contribute greatly to their children's development when they are encouraged to communicate openly and honestly about issues, concerns, goals, and values.
 - Family members should be nurtured in their roles as advocates for their children's development and learning by being invited to serve on boards or councils that serve in an advisory capacity to the program.
 2. Children develop in the context of families that differ according to structure, language, ethnicity, belief systems, and cultural practices.
 - Effective partnerships with family and community are characterized by mutual trust and respect for the values, attitudes, expectations, and cultures of other individuals, willingness to collaborate in problem-solving, and use of language that can be understood by all.
 3. Early education and care programs benefit from and contribute to the community at large through collaborative partnerships.
 4. Families are best able to rear children when they are adequately prepared to serve as advocates for children.
- Children benefit when professionals understand and respect the family regardless of its composition, internal dynamics, religious beliefs, cultural practices, languages spoken, socioeconomic status, educational level, ability levels, and special interests or goals.
 - Practitioners know and use a variety of formal and informal communication strategies to establish and maintain positive reciprocal relationships with families, including at least rudimentary use of languages spoken in the homes.
 - Family diversity is reflected in materials and activities used in the learning environment.
 - Children's development is optimized when there is continuity between the home and the early education and care environment in terms of experiences and expectations.
 - Practitioners communicate frequently (daily, weekly, or monthly as appropriate to the situation) about specific experiences such as developmental milestones, changes in physical condition, interesting learning opportunities, and emotionally laden experiences so that both family members and early childhood practitioners are able to respond appropriately to the child's needs.
 - Practitioners collaborate with family members to solve developmental challenges by giving and receiving information, providing supportive follow-up to collaborative decisions, and by facilitating access to appropriate community resources.



Practices Based on Knowledge

Early childhood professionals in all types of settings that serve young children facilitate positive reciprocal relationships with families and communities. They:

1. Know and respect families that they serve.
2. Use various communication strategies to establish a working partnership with families (e.g., share information regarding the family in which the child lives, the child's experiences in care, and the child's developmental progress) and to involve family members actively in various components of the program.
3. Facilitate mutually beneficial linkages among families, agencies, businesses, organizations and other community resources.
4. Nurture the capacity of family members to serve as advocates for their own children and for children of the larger community.



Competency	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Early childhood professionals at ALL LEVELS have knowledge related to:	Professionals at Level I implement practices according to program guidelines and policies. They:	Professionals at Level II demonstrate the skills present at the previous level. In addition, they work independently and take initiative in designing environments to facilitate development. They:	Professionals at Level III demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they design, assess, and modify the learning environment to meet children's changing needs. They also model excellent practices and encourage others to develop proficiency in skills. They:	Professionals at Level IV demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they provide leadership for planning, implementing, assessing, and modifying the program to ensure continuous improvement. They conduct inquiry to advance the understanding of best practices for their communities. They:
1. Knowing and Respecting Families				
1.1 Mutual Respect	Demonstrate awareness of the role of family as the party having primary responsibility for decisions regarding goals and values for the child	Communicate with family members to become familiar with the family's circumstances, goals, values, and concerns	Incorporate family values and goals and concerns when planning curriculum and making decisions about the learning environment	Create program policies that are respectful of the needs and circumstances of all families
1.2 Respect for All Families	Demonstrate respect for all families regardless of composition, race, income, language, religion, special needs, and cultural practices	Use learning activities and communication strategies that are sensitive to all families	Design the learning environment so that curriculum activities, arrangement of physical spaces, selection of materials/equipment, assessment procedures, and scheduling are respectful of all families	Develop a system for monitoring and eliminating practices that are insensitive to family circumstances
1.3 Welcoming Environment	State the importance of creating a welcoming environment for all families	Create an environment that welcomes and responds to all families	Help other practitioners find ways to be welcoming and responsive to all families	Inform others of the importance of a welcoming and inclusive environment for all families
1.4 Positive Relationships	State the importance of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with families	Implement strategies for establishing and maintaining positive relationships with families	Plan activities in which members of various families form positive relationships with each other	Mentor assistants and/or staff members and colleagues in developing skills that promote positive relationships with families

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2. Communication				
2.1 Listening to Families	Listen to family members' expressions of values, goals, interests, and concerns in conversations	Use various methods to learn about families' goals, values, interests, and concerns	Create and implement formal and informal opportunities for communicating with families to learn about specific needs or concerns regarding the child	Design systematic mechanisms for assessing the program's responsiveness to family values, goals, interests, and concerns
2.2 Involving Families	Ask families about special interests of the child that may help plan daily activities in the setting Welcome family members as visitors to the program	Invite families to observe and/or participate in daily activities and to assist in planning future activities	Model for others and help others develop and refine skills for involving families in daily activities, long range plans, and policy decisions	Ensure that family members are involved in program-wide activities and opportunities that are sensitive to schedules, values, and cultural practices of family members
2.3 Communicating Regarding Child's Activities	Communicate with family members daily to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from family members about child's activities, interests, special needs, new skills observed at home, upcoming events, and other activities that impact the child's life • Share information about program activities, achievement of new developmental skills, food intake, guidance issues, or activities of special interest 	Adapt plans and routines in response to information learned from families	Model for others and assist others to develop skills for communicating with families regarding the child's activities	Design systems for staff and families to exchange information on daily routines, upcoming events, and children's responses to activities
2.4 Communicating Regarding Child's Progress	Exchange information about current activities, concerns, and accomplishments on a daily basis	Communicate child's developmental progress with sensitivity to parental values/goals and reactions	Communicate formally and informally, to share and to receive information on child's developmental progress and to set goals for further development	Develop program policies for early childhood professionals and family members to share information regarding children's developmental progress

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2.5 Communicating Regarding Atypical Development or Special Needs	<p>Observe and record children's development and share relevant information with supervisor</p> <p>Avoid the use of negative labels when sharing information about an individual with a disability (i.e., refer to the person rather than the disability)</p>	<p>Communicate with families, in a sensitive and confidential manner, regarding possible developmental challenges, suggest follow-up, and provide information on resources to address the need</p> <p>Avoid the use of negative labeling when referring to a person with a disability</p>	<p>Model skills and encourage others to communicate with families, in a sensitive and confidential manner, regarding possible developmental challenges, suggest follow-up, and provide information on resources to address the need</p>	<p>Support other professionals in acquiring skills needed to communicate effectively with families regarding suspected delays or special needs</p>
2.6 Communicating in Ways Families Can Understand	<p>Recognize the importance of using some of the family's preferred language when possible</p> <p>Find ways to communicate via facial expressions, voice tone, friendly gestures, etc.</p> <p>Recognize that there may be a need for translation assistance</p>	<p>Makes an effort to use, at least at the rudimentary level, the language spoken in the home</p> <p>Arrange for translation when needed</p>	<p>Structure the learning environment to incorporate some elements of languages spoken in family homes</p>	<p>Mentor other professionals in using language that is responsive to family preferences</p>
2.7 Maintaining Confidentiality	<p>Maintain confidentiality for children and family members in regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific information about family circumstances • Assessment of child's progress 	<p>Share information with families about circumstances under which information will be shared with other agencies</p> <p>Inform family members about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can gain access to the records kept by the program • What procedures are used to protect records from unauthorized use 	<p>Model and help others develop skills for preserving confidentiality of information about child's behaviors and results of developmental assessments</p>	<p>Establish policies for implementing, maintaining, and monitoring confidential information and share this information with assistants/staff and family members</p>
2.8 Recognizing Symptoms of Stress	<p>Recognize signs of family stress</p>	<p>Listen to family members' reports of stressful circumstances and organize the learning environment to be responsive to children's needs during times of unusual stress</p>	<p>Provide information to family members about stress management and relevant community resources</p>	<p>Provide support to other professionals (i.e., assistants, staff members, or colleagues) regarding ways to be responsive to families experiencing stress</p>
2.9 Nurturing Families in Rearing Children	<p>Assist family members to find reliable sources of childrearing information</p>	<p>Share information from reliable sources on childrearing topics</p>	<p>Arrange formal and informal opportunities for discussion of childrearing topics</p>	<p>Critically review childrearing literature and resources, and select relevant topics and appropriate materials to share with families</p>

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2.10 Arranging Opportunities for Collaboration and Support	Use various types of methods for exchanging information and offering support	Plan and implement a variety of opportunities for families to exchange information	Plan, implement, and evaluate various strategies for exchanging information	Ensure that program assistants/staff arrange opportunities for families and staff to exchange information and to provide support for each other
2.11 Involving Families in Policy Decisions	Clearly communicate policies to family members and listen when they share reactions to policy decisions	Invite family members to comment on policies and be responsive to families' perspectives to the extent possible within program goals	Model for others and help others develop skills in involving families in policy decisions	Provide leadership in developing opportunities for families' perspectives to be represented in program policy decisions

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3. Collaborative Community Partnerships				
3.1 Facilitating Education and Awareness of Community Resources	Introduce community resources to the children	Plan for activities that include community resources	Design curricular activities that create an awareness among children of various basic community resources (e.g., police, fire, medical)	Ensure that assistants/staff, children, and family members are aware of community resources
3.2 Facilitating Linkages Between Families and Community Resources	Can locate a listing of community resources	Share information with families regarding community resources	Refer a family to a community resource for assistance and seek out community resources (when appropriate)	Create and maintain a list of current community resources and make the list available to practitioners and families
3.3 Facilitating Access to Community Resources	Demonstrate awareness of the importance of helping families locate community resources	Compile and share information with families regarding access to community resources, and help families make the initial contact with community organizations or agencies	Use knowledge of and access to community resources to enrich the curriculum and children's learning experiences	Promote collaboration among agencies that serve families
3.4 Agreements with Community Agencies, Organizations, and Businesses	Demonstrate awareness of agreements with community agencies, organizations, and businesses	Communicate with representatives from various community organizations, agencies, and businesses regarding needed services and procedures for gaining access to services	Share with others information related to agreements with community organizations, agencies and businesses	Establish formal and informal agreements with community organizations and agencies that serve families
3.5 Participating as Citizen in Community-at-Large	Participate in community events occasionally to become familiar with historical and cultural aspects of the community and to create an awareness among community members of the role of early childhood professionals	Participate frequently in community activities and actively inform others of the needs of children and families in the community	<p>Arrange opportunities for children to observe or participate in community events</p> <p>Participate in planning community events that welcome all children and families</p> <p>Initiate public awareness about the needs of children and families and about the impact of social and economic development on the well-being of children and families</p>	<p>Collaborate with artistic, historical, and other cultural community resources to further the goals of the local community</p> <p>Take an active role as a community citizen by serving in various capacities (e.g., board member, advisory council of local government, civic organizations) to sensitize the community to the needs of children and families and to the importance of promoting children's optimum development in order to strengthen the community</p>

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4. Nurturing Families as Advocates				
4.1 Transitions	Interact with families regularly about routine transitions (daily arrival and departure) and anticipated major transitions (e.g., classroom changes, preschool to kindergarten)	Share information with families about programs and services that might be helpful to families during transitions	Model and help others develop skills for nurturing families to navigate daily and major transitions	Oversee program's strategies for collaborating with families as primary decision makers for their children and with other programs or schools to facilitate transitions
4.2 Service Acquisition	Demonstrate awareness of community services that can benefit children and families, and share that information as needed	Nurture family members in their ability to negotiate services on behalf of their children	Nurture families' abilities to make primary decisions about services or special accommodations needed for the children	Oversee program's strategies, for building family members' skills and confidence regarding access to community services
4.3 Consent to Share Information	Follow guidelines for obtaining family consent before sharing information with other agencies/organizations	Follow guidelines for obtaining family consent before sharing information with other agencies/organizations and share these guidelines with assistants/staff and family members	Plan and implement procedures for obtaining family consent before sharing information with other agencies/organizations	Oversee procedures for obtaining consent from families before sharing information with other agencies/organizations